



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/2753  
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.  
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

**Title:**

Address at the opening of the new courthouse, Mt Gambier

Please acknowledge the source as:  
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.  
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/2753

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER, DON DUNSTAN, AT THE OPENING OF THE  
NEW COURTHOUSE, MT. GAMBIER. 10.10.75

---

Mr. Matison, Your Honors, Your Worship, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's taken a long time, but your new court-house is finished. The old one was in use for 110 years and no doubt some of you were beginning to think it might take just as long before this new building was ready.

But you would all agree, I'm sure, that it is an excellent building which was well worth waiting for. I am especially pleased to perform the opening ceremony because one of the earliest questions put to me when I became Attorney General in 1965 was from Alan Burdon and he asked me, just as he had asked previous Liberal Attorneys-General "When will a new court house be built at Mount Gambier?"

While I was Attorney General we went to the stage of having plans made, but when the Government changed as the result of antiquated and undemocratic electoral system which we are now at last changing, the project seemed to die. But we brought it back to life again and I feel very happy to be in Mt. Gambier on such a significant day in the city's history.

The new court house is a striking achievement for Mt. Gambier and with a final cost of \$ 940,000 an expensive one as well. Its unique design, with the two large court room areas and the provision for future expansion by adding a third chamber, combined with the excellent support facilities will make the administration of laws more efficient and comfortable for the people of the South East and the legal profession. On the subject of comfort, this air-conditioned complex ---- I think it has already been christened "The Taj Mahal" --- is a far cry from the old court house across the road.

The old building was never very satisfactory. Anyone who has ever appeared at the Mount Gambier Court House has their own favourite horror story about the place, although the tradition of complaining about the dreadful conditions at Mount Gambier goes back to before even the old court-house was built.

Right back in 1862, the first judge to preside at circuit court hearings in the city - Mr. Justice Gwynne - spent most of his first day in court criticising the absence of any witness box, prisoner's dock, jury space or accommodation for the judge.

I hope none of my learned legal friends try to emulate Judge Gwynne today, although I suppose he looked forward to the opening of the old court-house in 1865 as fervently as the people of Mount Gambier and the legal fraternity have waited for today's ceremony.

And just as the old court house was a focalpoint of the South East, this new building will play an even greater part in the community. It derives its significance not only because of its legal and governmental functions but because our social structure depends so heavily on a popular involvement with, and attachment to, the process of justice. The law is not divorced from the people ... it exists as the result of community mores and it is essential that the law should not see itself, or be seen by the people, as something separate from the lives and expectations of individuals.

If we call on the community to help maintain and administer the concept of law through involvement, we must make that participation straightforward and free from penalty. In the case of our new court-house, that can mean anything from having sufficient chairs for jurors to sit on through to the vastly improved facilities for people awaiting trial.

The conditions under which the courts operate are often as important as the laws they administer, and my Government is determined to ensure that the physical amenities which are often seen as an expression of the law are steadily improved. We are particularly concerned at improving the standard of court buildings in country areas, just as we are very sensitive to the many other needs of rural communities.

In Mount Gambier alone, my Government has done a tremendous amount since we came to office. The most recent improvements have been in education, roads, housing, water and sewerage works and community health.

Mt. Gambier High School has been dramatically up-graded in the past three years, and the additions opened recently, which cost \$ 340,000 are the latest results from that programme.

Major extensions costing almost \$ 2-millions are in progress to Grant High School where a library resource centre, Science complex and other improved educational resources are being made available to the district. The Primary Schools in the area have received new open space teaching units, and of course, the \$ 2-million South East College of Further Education is well on the way to completion. The Government has spent almost \$ 300,000 on roads in the area in the past 2 years, and another \$ 40,000 in works is planned for the immediate future. Improved Water and Sewerage facilities has cost \$ 1.2 million, and another \$ 2.9 millions is allocated for further upgrading of the system.

Mount Gambier Hospital will have a \$ 2.5 million Nurses Home and another \$ 400,000 has been allocated for expansion of the radiological department and pharmacy.

The Housing Trust in particular has been very active in the region, with two large subdivisions capable of taking almost 500 homes. As well the Trust is planning residential development for about 215 houses around the Fletcher Jones site.

In Millicent, where this afternoon I will be opening the new SAFCOL plant - which was built and financed by the Government through the Housing Trust - we have spent millions to improve the facilities available to the people of the area.

Put simply, the Government has spent a tremendous amount on the country areas of South Australia because we believe that all the people of this State have the right to enjoy an improving lifestyle. In many areas that means starting work on the legacy of years of neglect in areas such as schools, roads, hospitals and community welfare services.

My Government wants cities like Mount Gambier and Millicent to grow and to provide their residents with a diversity of interests and a sense of community. To say we are ignoring the country is complete nonsense.

Equally vacuous are the claims being made about the electoral reforms presently before Parliament. Let's take one particularly stupid piece of propoganda being peddled locally ... that the seat of Millicent will disapper and an additional 8,000 voters will be added to Mount Gambier, giving that seat a total enrolment of more than 19,000 people. Apart from anything else, that proposition displays an incredible inability to do simple arithmetic.

Taking the fact that there are 720,000 voters in the State and there will still be 47 seats, obviously the quota must be very close to 16,000. And since the terms of the act setting up the Boundaries Commission provide for one vote, one value, every seat must be as near as practicable to that figure. It would be impossible to put Millicent and Mount Gambier in the same electorate and still comply with the terms of the Act.

What the Independent Boundaries Commission will decide is still necessarily unknown. The members of that Commission ... a Senior Supreme Court Judge, the Surveyor General and the Electoral Commissioner ... will be men of complete integrity who will re-distribute the Legislative Assembly seats to ensure that all South Australians ... irrespective of where they live ... have an equal say in the running of their State. In future no-one will be able to say a vote is worth twice another vote simply because of where it was cast.

We are all part of one State, one Country and dependent on one economy. To attempt to set any section of the community against any other groups is the course for social disaster. The farmer and the city-dweller rely on each other. The urban communities rely on farmers for food and also on the foreign exchange from our rural industries. The farmer in turn needs the manufacturing base of cities for his galvanised iron, his farm machinery, his home furnishings and many other products of industrialised societies.

In the South East, we have tried to make that inter-dependence more local, by encouraging industries to establish in the area and to provide a stable basis for future growth of the entire region, and from that the whole State. To throw that away by saying the interests of the country and the cities are incompatible or exclusive hurts everyone, no matter where they live.

This court house is an example of how facilities for the entire community can be improved by expanding the industrial base of country areas and by decentralising industries such as Fletcher-Jones, the Forestry Commission and the SAFCOL Plant in Millicent.

Only with an even rate of development can we improve the services the community expects.

And while the opening of the new building is an occasion to celebrate, I feel equally pleased to be able to announce that the old Court House will be preserved and given to the National Trust for historic and community purposes. Some of the space will be used for a while by the Police Dpt. until new buildings are erected for them but the National Trust will be taking immediate possession of the old court room, the jury room, the witness room, the counsel room, the Crown Prosecutors Office, and, of course, the cells. The Police will temporarily keep the Public offices, the Magistrate's Office and the Sherrif's Office, but eventually they will also be given to the Trust so that the entire building will be preserved and the sense of history which it embodies will be preserved for the town and its visitors.

The National Trust, in particular the Mount Gambier Branch, has long been anxious to acquire the building and I am personally very happy that such a beautiful building will be given to the town and will be preserved by enthusiastic and dedicated local people working through the Mount Gambier Branch of the Trust. It is not very often that any town has such an opportunity to keep its history alive. So it gives me great satisfaction and pleasure to not only officially open the New Mount Gambier Court House but to give to the people of Mount Gambier the fine old building which has served them so well in the past and which will fulfil a new role in the community from now.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now declare the new Mount Gambier Court House Open.

Thank You.